

BOOK REVIEW

G. LEDYARD STEBBINS, WITH V.C. HOLLOWELL, V.B. SMOCOVITIS, AND E.P. DUGGAN (EDS). 2007. **The Ladyslipper and I**. (ISBN 978-1-930723-65-8, hbk.). Missouri Botanical Garden Press, PO Box 299, St. Louis, Missouri 63166-0299, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.mbgpress.org, 1-314-577-9547, orders@mbgpress.org). \$35.00, 173 pp., 24 b&w photos, 7 1/4" × 10 1/4".

G. Ledyard Stebbins—one doesn't read far in biology without coming across this name. *The Ladyslipper and I* is his autobiography, synthesized, perhaps much like his theories on evolution, from his own unpublished manuscript. This was a manuscript that he had worked on and rewritten during much of his life. Yet upon his death in 2000, it was still unpublished.

This subtly edited autobiography is a delightful peek into the development and life of an eminent 20th-century evolutionary botanist. Composed of 33 chapters, most about four or five pages long, it's an easy and practical read. Essentially it follows a chronological path but not so strictly as to be predictable or formulaic. The author weaves his social life and interests with his academic pursuits and its personas, all in a pleasant and engaging narrative style. This balance of humorous and sometimes revealing anecdotes of well-known academics and scientists along with their affects on Stebbins' own career are especially entertaining.

The chapters begin with his early life in Seal Harbor, Maine, where he was raised in a typical New England aristocratic home. He tells us of his early appreciation of nature and recounts his school and sibling travails. From there we learn about his boarding school days and finally get to his entrance to Harvard as a freshman. It is in his early years at Harvard that he makes the all-important decision to switch from his initial chosen field of law to one of the sciences.

It's enlightening to hear about these academic days in the early 20th century when Darwinism was not as ensconced as it is today. It's much to the credit of Stebbins and his fellow Neo-Darwinists who took their less-convinced professors to task and explored and advanced the relatively new theory to its present status. Once he earned his PhD and began his career, he became one of the prime players in the development of evolutionary biology. If you were studying botany at a university in the seventies, his story will, no doubt, ring sympathetic neurons as he recounts both social and academic tales about his prominent contemporaries who were coming to the height of their prowess.

But regardless of your background, *The Ladyslipper and I* both entertains and sheds light on the man and his work during some of the most exciting advances in evolutionary biology.—Robert J George, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas 76102-4025, U.S.A.